Ford's delay of action is a new form of climate change denial

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Body

Dismantle. Deny. Delay.

It's been a messy couple of years of climate (in) action under Premier Doug Ford's watch.

The last two weeks have felt like rock bottom - starting with Energy Minister Greg Rickford's admission that he gets policy advice from climate denial websites and bookended with the auditor general's stinging rebuke of Ford's climate plan.

High on drama and abysmally low on performance is one way to summarize this government's climate record.

Since they began dismantling climate action in Ontario, the Conservatives have experimented with both denial and delay.

Rickford's flirtation with climate conspiracy theories was not totally off-brand for a government that axed tree planting programs, ripped up renewable energy contracts and cut funding for flood prevention.

Not only has Ford wasted tax dollars sabotaging the federal government's climate plan, he's spent the past year sabotaging his own government's climate plan.

Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk has confirmed what many of us knew: Ford's climate plan is made to fail.

It's a plan that counts on electric vehicle sales to increase by 3,000 per cent, even though the government cancelled the very incentive programs that have helped spur this increase.

It's a plan that discards the ministry's own emissions modelling in favour of friendlier numbers submitted by industry.

And it's a plan that hangs its hat on unspecified and unfunded innovation to account for a big share of their emissions reductions.

Tone also matters when discussing climate change.

And if you pay attention, every remark the Conservatives make is some variant of: "We've done our share already," "Steady as she goes," or "Don't worry about it."

None of these sentiments are consistent with the scientific reality that climate pollution must start to decline in 2020 if we have any hope of meeting our climate obligations.

Try as they may, the Ford government is not entitled to its own selective version of the unfolding climate emergency. So, any claim that their targets are sufficient or that they are on track to achieving them is simple fantasy.

Because we do not get to negotiate with math and physics.

Delaying action, as Ford is doing, is the new form of climate denial, and it's a slap in the face of young people organizing climate strikes every Friday to demand a livable future.

It's also fiscally irresponsible while extreme flooding, forest fires, droughts, ice storms and other weather-related emergencies escalate.

Extreme weather events caused $1.3 billion in insurable losses last year in Ontario, with a three-hour rainstorm in Toronto dishing out $80 million in infrastructure damage alone.

I dare say we are not ready for the economic and social disruption that will come if homes and businesses located in floodplains becoming uninsurable, as many suspect.

Delayed action will also cost us on the job front.

How can a government that rips up renewable energy contracts attract a slice of the $322 billion pie being invested in clean energy every year according to the International Energy Agency?

Why would global automakers who are investing $255 billion in EV technology over the next five years choose a jurisdiction where EV chargers are being ripped out?

If the premier was serious about saving people money at the pumps, then he would help them avoid the pumps altogether by making EVs more affordable.

If the premier was serious about reducing energy costs for homeowners, renters and businesses, he would invest in energy efficiency programs, not cut them.

Solutions to the climate crisis exist. But we will not reap the benefits of these solutions if the premier is preoccupied with sabotaging them.

Mike Schreiner is leader of the Green Party of Ontario.

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